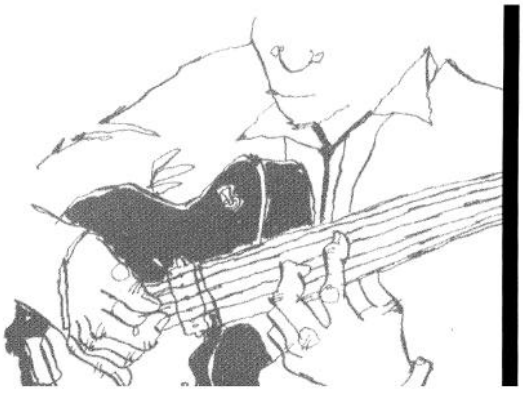
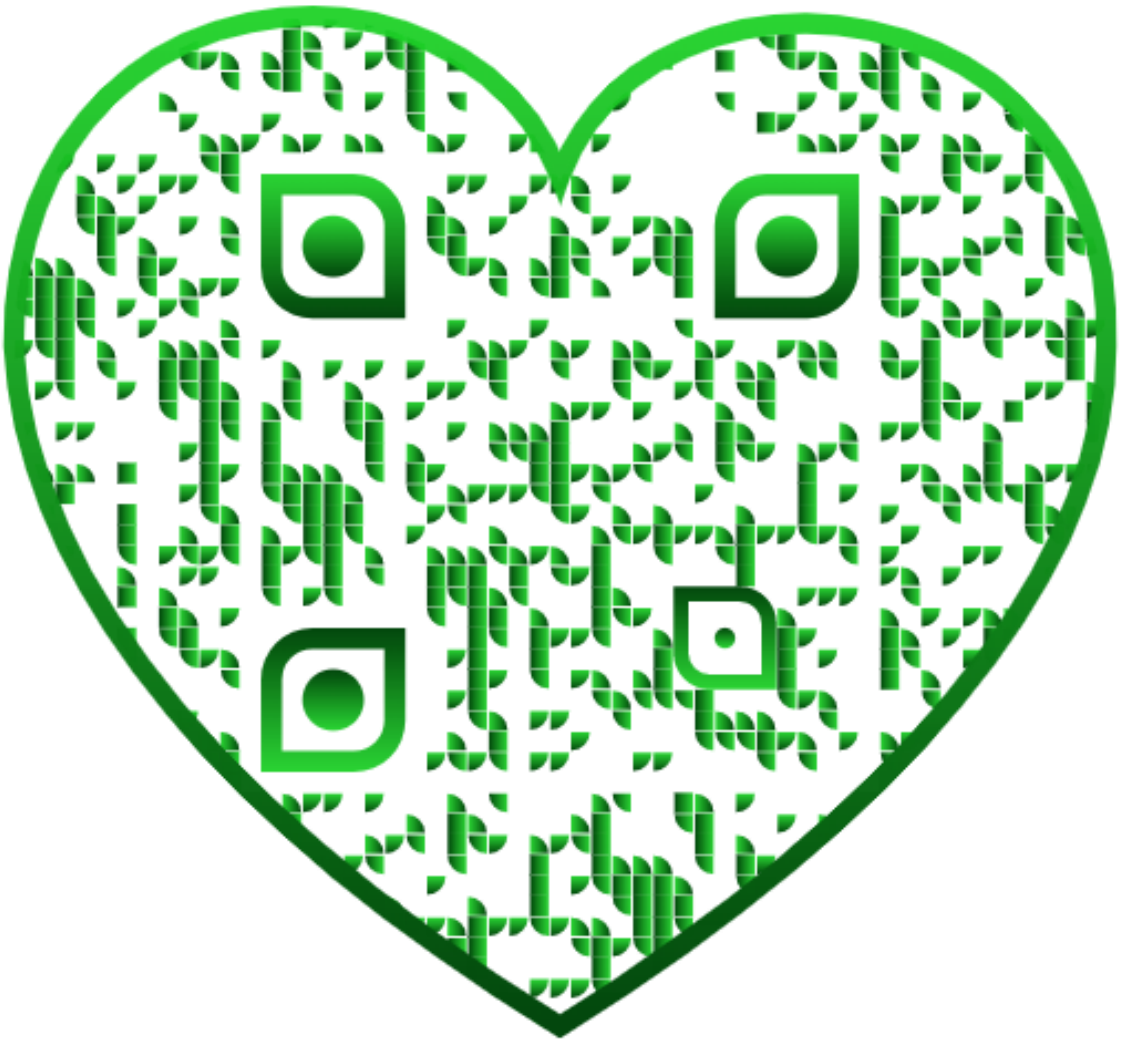


Raise Your Voice

Creating chords and melody at the same time is one of the most challenging and pleasurable ways to play guitar. There are three main rules of playing chord-melody style: The melody is almost always placed in the chord's highest voice; the melody note usually appears on the top two strings (sometimes on the

BY ARNIE BERLE • PHOTO: JUSTICE RECORDS



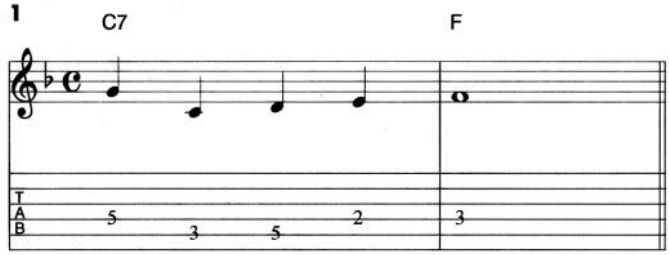
third); and the melody is usually played an octave higher than written. Getting the melody onto the upper strings by raising the pitch an octave leaves the lower strings free to form the supporting chord.

When playing chord-melody style, you must know how to voice a chord with either the root, 3, 5, or 7 on top.

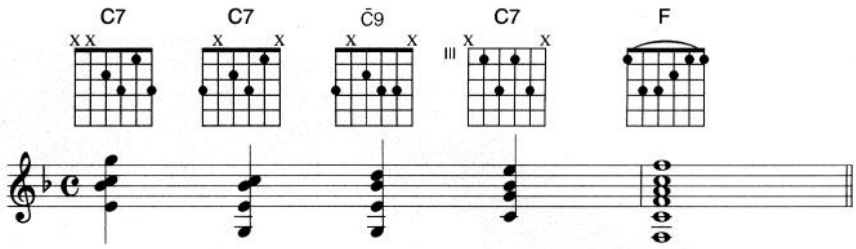
How would you go about harmonizing a simple melody like that in **Ex. 1**? First, raise the pitch an octave. Next, decide whether to harmonize every note with its own chord, or only some of the notes. To harmonize each note, we need four types of *C7* chord—one for each of the four melody notes in the top voice—and an *F* chord with an *F* note on top. **Ex. 2** shows one possibility. Notice that the third chord is *C9*; the melody note, *D*, is the 9 of *C*.

One of the coolest things about chord-melody style is the possibility for reharmonizing a tune. **Ex. 3** shows another treatment of our little melody. The *G* note is harmonized by a *Gm7* chord, the IIm chord that precedes *C7* (This time, the *C* is not harmonized; it's just

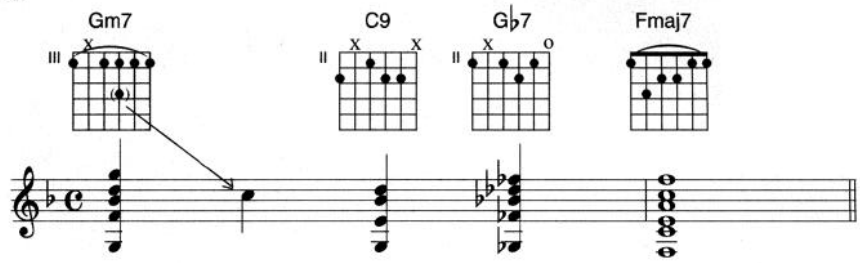
Ex. 1



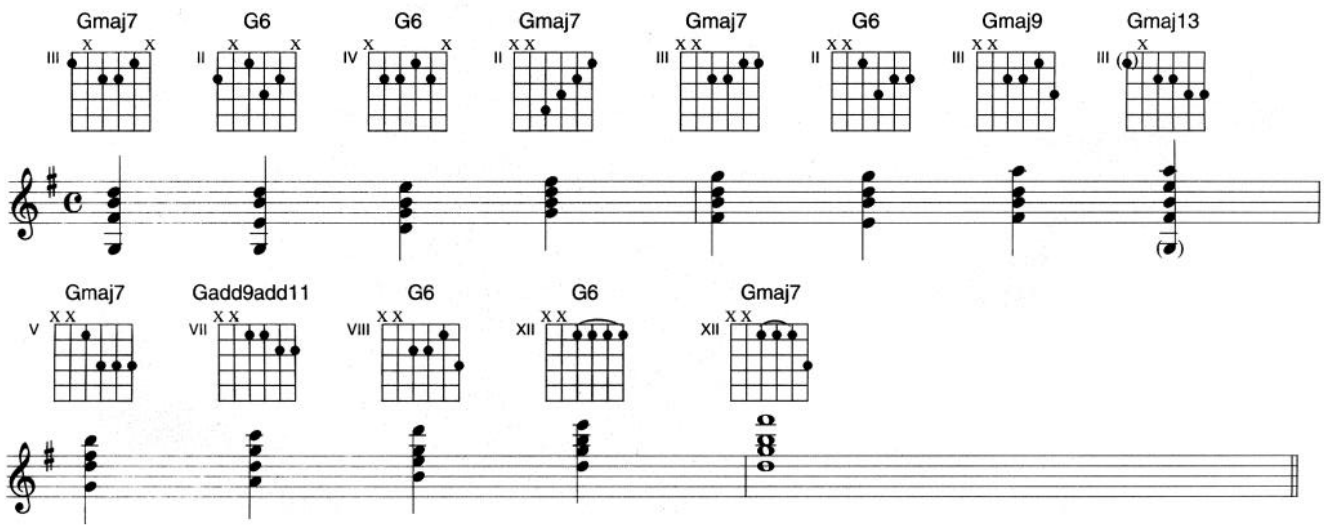
Ex. 2



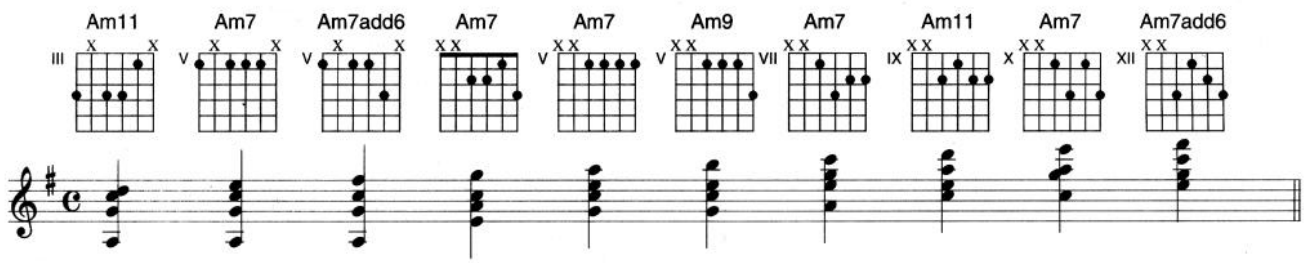
Ex. 3



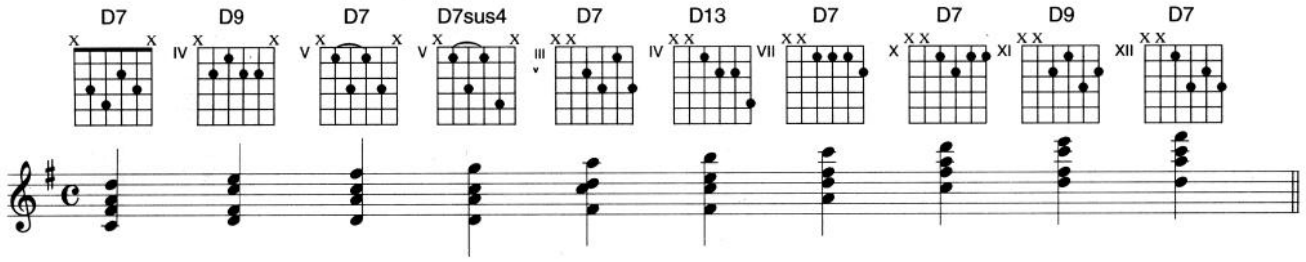
Ex. 4



Ex. 5



Ex. 6



a passing note between *Gm7* and *C9.)* Since the *E* note is harmonized by the 7 of *G♭7*, we now refer to it as *F♭*. The *G♭7* creates a descending bass line, which contrasts nicely with the ascending melody.

Ex. 4, a harmonized *G* major scale starting on *D*, will help you start thinking of how to form chords with different melody notes on top. Each chord is a version of the I in the key of *G*. In some places, I've included two different chords below a single melody note, just to show some possibilities. Transpose Ex. 4 into several keys.

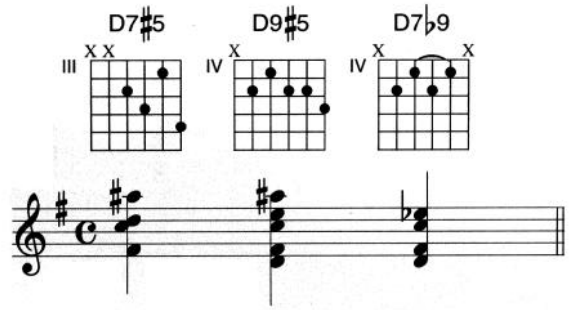
Since a given melody note is either one of the notes of the prevailing chord or a melodic extension of the chord, it's important to be able to play major, minor, and dominant chords with either the root, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, or 13 on top. We've done some of that with major chords; now let's look at minor and dominant chords.

Ex. 5 shows how to place each note of the diatonic scale in the top voice of an *Am7* chord, and **Ex. 6** does the same with *D7*. (You can think of *Am7* and *D7* as IIm and V in the key of *G*.)

To harmonize a non-diatonic melody note, simply use the chord form whose top note is nearest the chromatic tone, and then replace the diatonic note with the chromatic one. For example, you might use one of the first two chords in **Ex. 7** to play an *A♯* over a *D7* chord, or use the third chord to play an *E♭* over *D7*. Notice that the new chord symbols reflect the chromatic tones. The chords are now referred to as altered chords.

Let's apply what we've learned to a familiar folk melody, "Aura Lee." **Ex. 8** shows the first eight bars—since the last four bars are the same as the first four, we'll want to harmonize them differently to add variety. The harmonization in **Ex. 9** (next page) uses extended and altered chords, substitute chords, and half-step approach chords. Some

Ex. 7



Ex. 8

examples: The *Bm7* in bar 1 substitutes for the original *G*; the *B♭13* in the same bar is a half-step approach chord to the *A7* in bar 2, which is, in turn, a substitute for the original *Am*; and the *A♭7* in bar 3 is an approach chord to *Gadd9*. Also, note the cycle-of-fourths movement in bars 5 and 6.

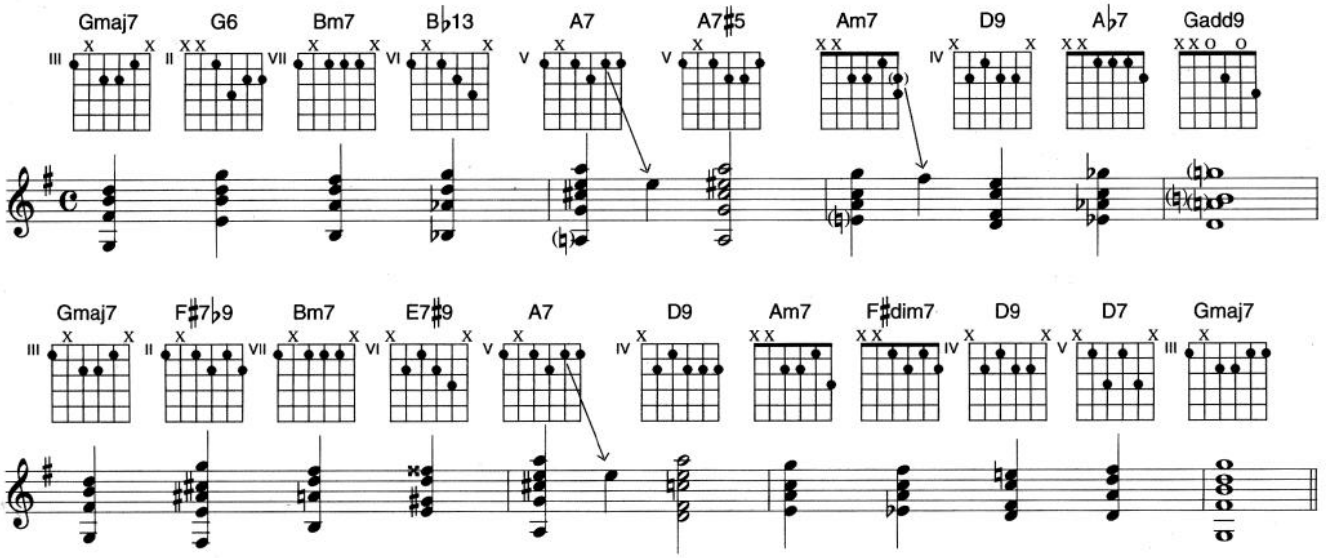
Ex. 10 shows the last eight measures of the tune with the traditional chords and a more interesting substitute progression. I've moved the *G7* in bar 2 back two beats and added a *Dm7* to create a IIm-V progression. This lets us cycle back and put an *A7* chord on the third beat of the first measure. I've preceded the *Gmaj7* in bar 4 with another IIm-V7 and I've added *two* IIm-V progressions in bars 6 and 7.

Now that we've filled out the harmony, we can take it a step further by adding some more colorful substitutions and half-step approach chords, as shown in **Ex. 11**. The *Em7* in bar 1 is a VIm substitute for I, while the *E♭7♯5* is a half-step approach chord to the *Dm7add6* in bar 2. (You can also think of the *E♭7♯5* as a tritone substitution for the original *A7*.) Note the additional half-step approach chords in bars 2, 3, 5, and 7. When a note is altered in relation to the prevailing chord, you must indicate the altered note in the chord symbol, as with the *A♭7♭9* in the third measure.

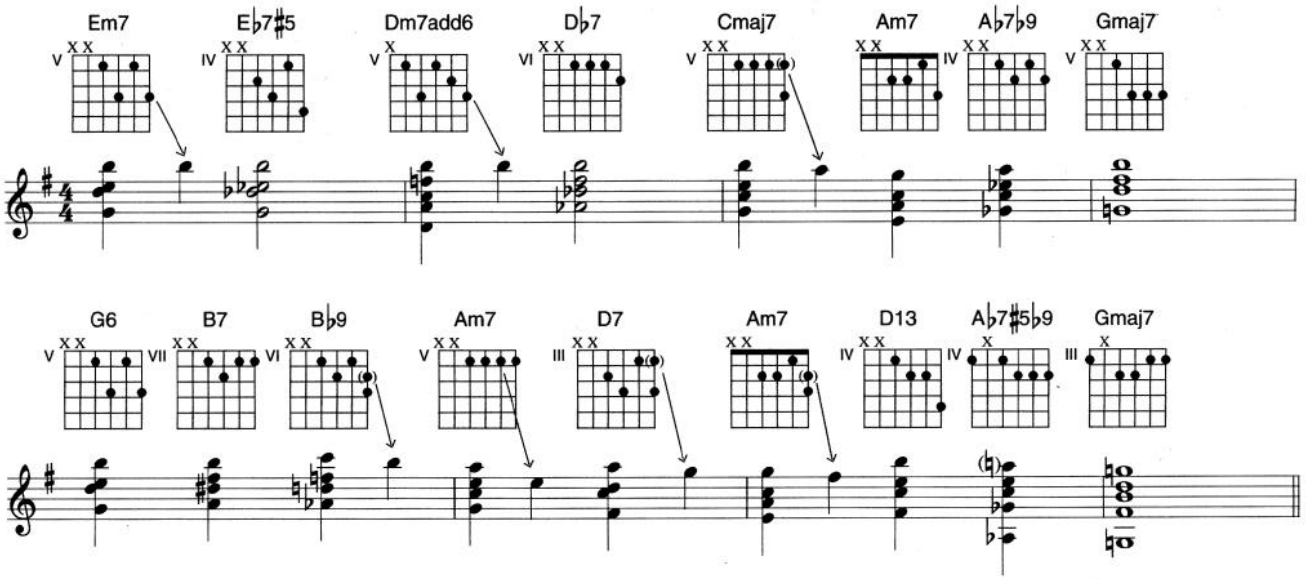
I've substantially reharmonized "Aura Lee" to show some of the possibilities. But in many cases the best setting for a simple tune is the simple, original chords. ■

Arnie Berle is a longtime teacher and the author of numerous instruction books. His Guitar Player *column ran for 15 years.*

Ex. 9



Ex. 10

original chords: G G7 C G G B7 E7 Am D7 G
substitute progression: Gmaj7 A7 Dm7 G7 Cmaj7 Am7 D7 Gmaj7 G6 B7 E7 Am7 D7 Am7 D7 Gmaj7
T A B

Ex. 11